Prospective witnesses- James W. Altgens 1/4/68

Possibly reading or rereading what I have written of Altgens in the two chapters of part three of WHITEWASH II takes more time that you now have. There is more on him in WHITEWASH and PHOTOGRAPHIC WHITEWASH. There is a copy of the unpublished index of WWII in your office. I gave it to Tom.

Using him as a witness can serve a number of purposes. I think those that might not immediately suggest themselves will have a very good effect on the jury and serve historical need.

He was one of the closer eyewitnesses to the assassination. If his camera was a through-the-lens reflex, he had an excellent view at the equivalent of Z255. He gave the most graphic testimony about the spray of brain matter over the left side, which is entirely inconsistent with the right side of the head only having exploded out. Going along with some of my unpublished material in POST MORTEM, which is entirely substantiated by the Z film, he can be used to destroy the official explanation of the fatal wound. He can testify to the wind, having gotten a picture of Mrs. Kennedy as the car turned from Main into Houston and as she grabbed her hat to keep the wind from blowing it off.

He challenged Liebeler to a reconstruction of where he was standing. Liebeler backed off but maintained the wrong position. In fact, Liebeler marked the position where Altgens was, not Altgens. I used this and erred, for Liebeler put him in the wrong place, therefore, the chart I made based on Liebeler's marking of Altgens position when he took his most famous picture locates the car at the wrong place.

Despite the importance of his picture- and any other he might have made- the FBI avoided him until it could no longer, for about eight months. There had to be a very good reason for this. I suggest that in a competent questioning it will come out. I think it is not alone because of the brain spray, although that could be enough. In fact, so little was known about him, although his is the most famous single picture of all and was the first on the wire, that by the time Sprague got to talk to him, Altgens did not recall how many pictures he actually made. I think it is a dozen, from what Sprague told me. The others seem to be of less significance, but they do delay the time he could have gotten onto the grassy knoll to the point where anyone there would have disappeared or merged with the searchers, something Liebeler was careful to avoid in his questioning. It was public embarrassment that finally caused the FBI to interview Altgens.

More, as a photographer, he may be assumed to be a bit sharper as an observer than most people. I think that were he led into his exchange with Liebeler over how close he was, he might recall things. This entire thing would be very destructive of the official fiction in a most comprehensible way, which I think would be effective with the jury and the judge. Merely showing how he was avoided, then how he was questioned, and then that he had unknown pictures should be very effective. I have twice placed calls to Sprague, but he has not responded. Jaffe wrote a meaningless memo on his interview with Altgens.